

## Knowing The Team Around Your Patient

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### Abstract.

There are many different professionals who all contribute to the health and support of patients. Understanding each one's different specialty is important so that support workers know who the patient needs involved in their care and when. The Code of Conduct for Healthcare Support Workers and Adult Social Care Workers in England (Skills for Care and Skills for Health, 2013) identifies that working in collaboration with colleagues is an important part of the support workers role. Within section three and four it highlights three key areas. As support workers you must "recognise and respect the roles and expertise of your colleagues both in the team and from other agencies and disciplines, and work in partnership with them," "work openly and co-operatively with colleagues including those from other disciplines and agencies, and treat them with respect," and "communicate effectively and consult with your colleagues as appropriate." Within this article these three key areas of partnership working, respect and communication will be explored and discussed.

Key Words: Collaboration, Communication, Co-operation, Multidisciplinary, Partnership Working, Respect, Support Worker, Team Work.

### Introduction

Support workers are a vital and key part of the health and social care team around the patient. They provide the majority of hands on care and support, spending more time with patients than any other staff (Cavendish, 2013). Support workers are therefore ideally placed to know their patient's wishes and concerns. Thereby being able to provide valuable information and insights into their patient's needs. The support workers voice needs to be heard so this information can influence ongoing care management and decision making (Atwal and Jones, 2007). As stated by Skills for Care and Skills for Health (2013) support workers must "understand and value your contribution and the vital part you play in your team." An important part of this care is working alongside other professional groups, such as nurses, doctors, physiotherapists, dieticians, and social workers. The list can be endless depending on the needs of your patient and change over time.

### Partnership Working

Collaboration and partnership working is a key part of delivering care to your patient and their family. As stated in section four of the Code of Conduct for Healthcare Support Workers and Adult Social Care Workers in England (Skills for Care and Skills for Health, 2013), support workers need to “work in collaboration with your colleagues to ensure the delivery of high quality, safe and compassionate healthcare, care and support.” Collaboration is defined by Skills for Care and Skills for Health (2013) as “the action of working with someone to achieve a common goal.”

This is important as patients often present with a range of challenging and complex needs. Their needs are increasingly chronic in nature as opposed to acute. These then require a multi-professional approach (Stonehouse, 2013).

Partnership working is about working as a team, recognising that not one person can meet all the diverse needs of your patient. Through working together in a positive way brings benefits for both yourself and your patient. Ndoro (2014) highlights that when effective collaboration takes place high quality care can be delivered, but warns that when this does not occur lapses in care can be the result.

Oliver et al (2010:6) in a review of the evidence on integrated working, professionals identified that when it works well it can lead to “improved enjoyment and well-being in their working lives; enhanced knowledge and understanding of other professional roles.” While Karam et al (2017:82) simply states that “collaboration contributes to the development of a high-quality work environment.”

## Respect

In section 3.2 of the Code (Skills for Care and Skills for Health, 2013) it states that support workers must “recognise and respect the roles and expertise of your colleagues both in the team and from other agencies and disciplines” and in 3.3 it goes on to state “and treat them with respect.”

Respect is defined within the Code (Skills for Care and Skills for Health, 2013) as “to have due regard for someone’s feelings, wishes or rights.” Within the context of the team, it is about recognising your colleagues as professionals and acknowledging the role and expertise they bring to the patient’s care.

Of course this respect needs to go both ways. Support workers need to be recognised for the pivotal role they play in delivering quality, safe care. What is required is a clear understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities. Only when this is achieved will different professional groups appreciate the contribution and importance of each other’s roles and the team work together for the good of the patient.

Support workers also need to have respect for themselves. Self-respect is what Banks and Gallagher (2009) identify as valuing your own practice and recognising that what you do is worthwhile. All staff are there for the care and support of the

patient. Through communication and partnership working will a true understanding of each other's roles and expertise be recognised and respected.

### Effective Communication

Effective communication between the support worker and other members of the health and social care team is vital. As stated in section four of the Code (Skills for Care and Skills for Health, 2013), support workers need to "communicate in an open and effective way to promote the health, safety and wellbeing of people who use health and care services and their carers."

For communication to be effective there should be information sharing in both directions (Lewis, 2014), from the support worker to the other team member and back again. This is so that you can check that the information you have shared has been understood and how it is going to be acted upon.

Whelan and Hughes (2016) identify that one of the challenges in healthcare is that due to the variety of staff involved in a patients care, means that the information each professional needs may be different. Therefore any written referrals or documentation needs to be written clearly containing all the required information. It needs to be jargon free with abbreviations written out in full.

Another challenge is that each professional group speak their own language with unique terminology (Burrill, 1999). This can lead to misunderstanding and confusion. Support workers need to be exactly clear what is being said and proposed. This may mean questioning other team members to gain this clarity. As the Code (Skills for Care and Skills for Health, 2013) goes on to state in 4.2 you must "communicate effectively and consult with your colleagues as appropriate."

Sir Francis Bacon (1597) is commonly attributed to having first used the phrase 'knowledge is power.' Gaining a knowledge of the roles which other professionals have will give the support worker the power to ensure that their patients are receiving the best care possible from the right people at the right time.

### Conclusion.

So to conclude, this article has highlighted the importance of support workers having a good understanding of the many and varied roles which different professionals of the multidisciplinary team provide. Partnership working together with mutual respect and effective communication are key. Patients have increasingly complex and multiple conditions requiring a wide range of disciplines being involved in their care and support. Support workers are therefore best placed to liaise between these many professional groups, often being the one professional who knows the patient needs and wishes best. Importantly support workers need to have self-respect for their own roles, recognising the valuable contribution and vital part you play in delivering care of the highest quality. As stated by Griffin (2013), what is needed is genuine partnership at all levels of the NHS to raise the status of support workers.

### Key Points:

1. Support workers are vital members of the team and must understand the valuable contribution you make.
2. Understanding different professional's roles is vital in delivering quality, safe care.
3. Mutual respect between all professional groups is required for effective team working to take place.
4. Support workers also need to have self-respect, recognising the worthwhile nature of your practice.
5. Support workers need to demonstrate effective communication, both verbally and in writing.

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